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Remote file attributes are retrieved, stored, and accessed for use on a local data processing system's installable file system. The remote file attributes are first obtained on a remote host by a communication program located on the remote host. The remote file attributes are then transferred to a client communication program on the local data processing system via a message. The client communication program uses the local data processing system's shared storage mechanisms to save the remote file attributes and to make them available to other processes executing on the local data processing system. The remote file attributes have an associated lifetime or duration on the local data processing system. This lifetime is pre-determined by the client communication program as to not to exceed a certain time limit, and the remote file attributes are cleared when this maximum lifetime is reached. This clearing causes periodic synchronization between the remote file attributes stored on the local data processing system and the remote file attributes on the host.